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Howdy!

As you may recall, the loser of the annual AI bowl pick'em contest gets the privilege of writing the editor's note in the next issue of the magazine. If you were keeping score, then you probably know who the loser was, and are fully aware that it was not yours truly. "She who shall not be named" is the bride of the person who typically brings you this note, mother of Madeline and has a dachshund named Chloe. No more hints, though. I told Kim that I wouldn't sell her out, and her secret is safe with me.

You see, Brian and I both go into the contest knowing that we've got better odds than most when it comes to finishing last and having to write the editor's note. While both of our wives like to participate in making the picks, neither of them is willing to suffer the consequences of losing. Perhaps if the terms weren't so dire they'd be willing to accept them, but when it comes to putting pen to paper for all the world to see, as President George H.W. Bush so delicately put it: Not. Gonna. Happen. But we're okay with it. When it comes to marriage, it's all about picking your battles. And considering Brian and I both choose to write on a consistent basis anyway, it's really not worth trying to get either of our wives to write a concession speech.

Before moving away from the topic at hand completely, I wanted to let you know that we're not going to publish the final results of the pick'em contest in the magazine. To be honest, I can't even remember who won. In the back of my mind I want to say that it was me who brought home the championship for the first time, claiming the title outright in a head to head victory over Shawn in the national championship game, running through the streets of my neighborhood singing "We Are the Champions" at the top of my lungs and getting showered with confetti and psalms of praise by my loving wife and daughter... but I really don't remember.

If you really want to know the final standings of the contest, feel free to reach us via Facebook (Aggieland-Illustrated-Magazine), twitter (@aggiemag) or by good old-fashioned email. We'll happily give you the results, and will even hook you up with a free 1-year online gift subscription just for reaching out to us.

Speaking of promotions, if you're reading this, then you're probably one of the faithful followers who chooses to read our magazine cover to cover every time. We want you to know that we appreciate you more than you can imagine. We really do. It's our pleasure to bring you this magazine and share the stories of the amazing student athletes and coaches who represent our beloved university. So for you avid AI readers, we want to reward you. Find the number of times the word "Aggieland" appears in the magazine and send an email to aggieland@aggiemag.com with your guess. Get the number correct, and we'll hook you up with a free two-year gift subscription for yourself or a loved one.

Finally, we want to welcome our new interns to the AI family. Kelsey, Macy and Mindy will be spending time with us this spring and summer, and we're excited about all they bring to the table.

Best of luck to Gary Blair, Mark Turgeon, Pat Henry, Jo Evans and Rob Childress as they continue to bring excitement and winning traditions to Aggieland this spring. Not only do they make us proud, they also make our jobs more fun!

Gig'em

Mumy Kenda



Aggieland

EDITORIAL

Brian Davis '01

Publisher/Editor

brian@aggiemag.com

Jeremy Kslonda '04

Managing Editor

jeremy@aggiemag.com

Jason McConnell '01

Associate Editor/Photo Editor

jason@aggiemag.com

ADVERTISING

Rob Havens '88

Advertising Sales Manager

(979) 229-8046

rob@aggiemag.com

PRODUCTION/CIRCULATION

Kimberly Davis '01

kim@aggiemag.com

Sunnye Davis

sunnye@aggiemag.com

COPY EDITORS

Shawn Kruse '02

bowlerfox@aggiemag.com

Katie McConnell '09

katie@aggiemag.com

ASSISTANT TO THE MANAGING EDITOR

Stacey Kslonda '05

stacey@aggiemag.com

MARKETING/EDITORIAL INTERNS

Kelsey Keene '12

kelsey@aggiemag.com

Mindy Magee '12

mindy@aggiemag.com

Macy Savage '12

macy@aggiemag.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Scott Clendenin '89

scott@aggiemag.com

Lyssa Hamilton '99

lyssa@aggiemag.com

Gentry "Scoop" Woodard

scoop@aggiemag.com

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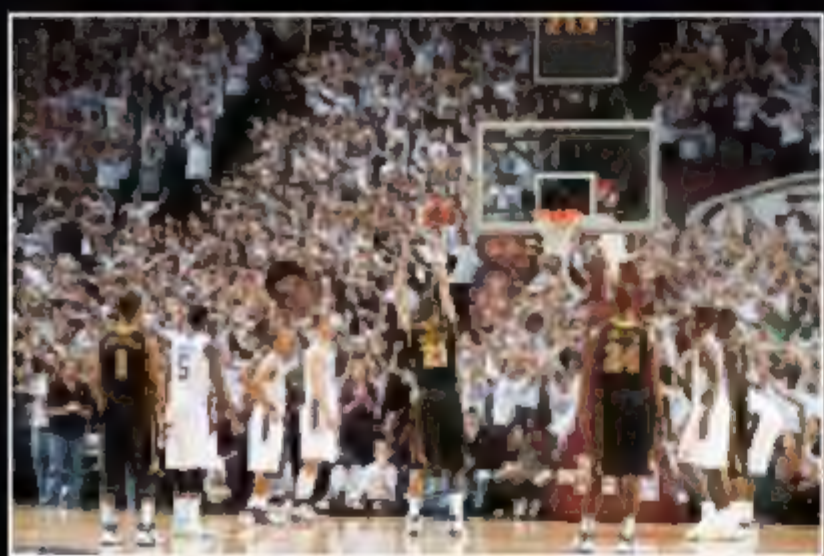




cotton picker

Junior Coryell Judie's acrobatic interception stopped LSU's opening drive, leading to a touchdown and an early 10-0 Aggie lead. In arguably the most anticipated bowl game outside of the BCS National Championship, Texas A&M was outscored by the Tigers, 41-24, in the 75th AT&T Cotton Bowl Classic at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington. Photos by Jason McConnell '01 and Brian Davis '01.





overdive

Senior Nathan Walkup and Missouri's Matt Pressey dive for a loose ball during the No. 13 Aggies' 91-89 overtime victory over the 12th-ranked Tigers. Walkup finished with 16 points and 3 steals. The Ags have played in four overtime games so far this season, winning three. Photos by Brian Davis '01.

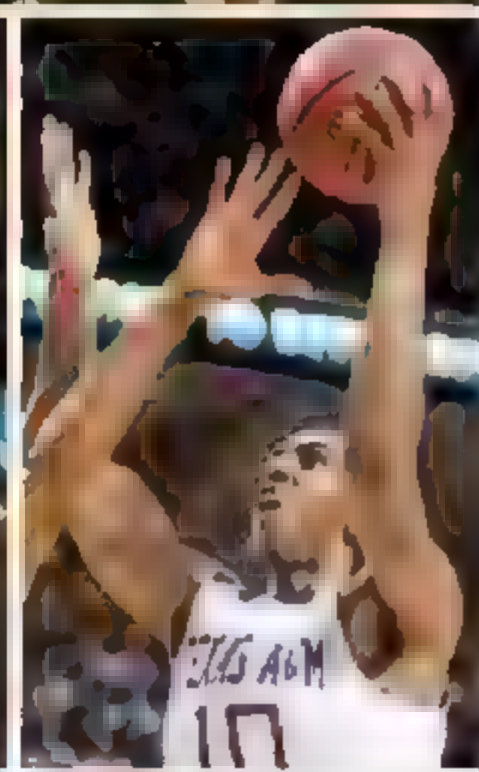


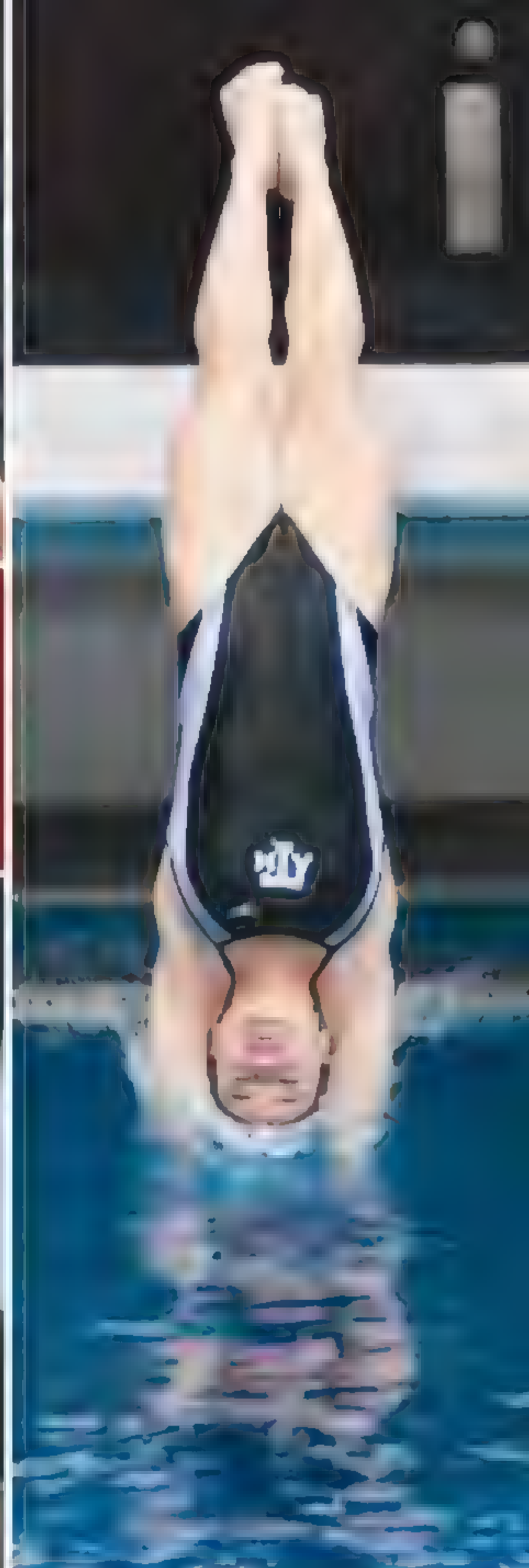




record breakers

Senior Danielle Adams shoots over Destiny Williams. The Aggies lost a heartbreaker to Baylor in front of a record crowd of 13,162. The Big 12's leading scorer and rebounder, Adams broke A&M's single game scoring record with 40 points against Kansas two weeks later. Photos by Jason McConnell '01





(men's basketball) Despite going through tough patch in conference play, Mark Torgerson's team is still positioned very well for potential third place finish in the Big 12 standings and the invitation to the big dance. From here on out, if the Ags win the ones they should and are able to steal another victory or two, they will likely earn a great seed in the NCAA Tournament. During what many expected to be a down year for the program, (women's basketball) Gary Blair's ladies are playing some of the best basketball of his tenure in Aggieland, and finally after two gut-wrenching losses to Miami Baylor and another to then-No. 5 Duke, we would be talking about an undefeated Aggie women's basketball squad. Behind a phenomenal senior season by Danielle Adams, this group has been ranked in the top 8 all season long and has Final Four potential. (women's tennis) As the No. 15 singles player in the nation, sophomore Pleasant Lirio (above) is the highest ranked Aggie since 1981. (men's tennis) The men's team (ranked No. 65 in the nation) has the talent and depth to surprise on their Sweet 16 trip in 2010. (swimming & diving) The regular season is over for the Texas A&M swimming and diving program with their next action coming at the Big 12 Championships in Austin.





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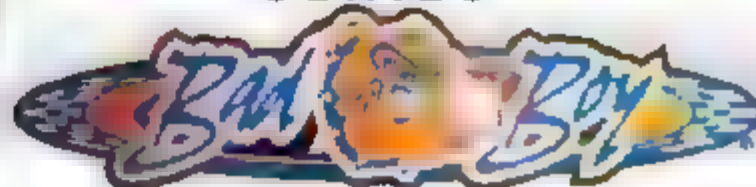


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2011 BASEBALL PREVIEW

Behind a stellar starting rotation, the Aggies' eyes are on a trip to Omaha



Texas A&M enters the season with a No. 13 ranking according to the USA Today coaches' poll, and that is a fair assessment of the talent assembled on the 2011 squad. Even with holes to fill offensively and losing a first round draft pick on the mound, the Aggies still have enough talent to host a regional this spring and be in a good position to advance to the College World Series for the first time under sixth-year head coach Rob Childress.

"We are not playing for February 18 and the start of the season against Le Moyne," Childress said. "This is a long journey and we have to grow and get better each day. Our hope is to play at the end of June and our expectation is to play in the College World Series."

The 2010 season ended with Aggie coaches, players and fans enduring soaring heat and near hurricane storms at the NCAA Coral Gables Regional. What ended up basically a best of three series with host Miami, the Aggies force a "what if" game for a trip to the super regionals, but came up short with a 10-3 defeat. The 43-21-1 campaign was highlighted by a fourth consecutive postseason appearance under Childress and the program's second Big 12 Tournament championship in the last three years. The Aggies finished the season ranked 21st in the USA Today/ESPN Poll.

Texas A&M returns 19 letter winners, including twelve pitchers from a staff that was one of the nation's best. The Aggies ranked 13th nationally with a 3.70 team earned run average and second nationally with 9.3 strikeouts per nine innings.

The athleticism and speed of the team will be needed for new offensive coach Andy Sawyers to take advantage of a big change in college baseball. The NCAA has changed the exit speed of the aluminum bat in 2011, meaning speed and defense will be a premium as the game will resemble professional baseball now more than ever.

ON THE MOUND

The Aggies have to replace three key players from last year's pitching staff. Now a member of the Texas Rangers organization, All-American and first-round draft pick Barret Loux went 11-2 with a 2.83 ERA and posted a team-high 136 strikeouts in 2010. Clayton Ehlert and Shane Minks both had solid senior seasons and signed with professional baseball after last year. Ehlert was 4-6 with a 4.87 ERA and Minks was 2-2 with a 3.52 ERA.

The top returner on the mound is junior All-American John Stilson. He was clearly the most dominant reliever in college baseball last year with a 9-1 record

and 10 saves. Stilson also struck out 114 batters in 79 innings of work while leading the country and setting a new A&M record with a 0.80 ERA. His role is going to change in 2011, at least in the early part of the season. Coach Childress is moving Stilson into Loux's Friday night role to set the tone for the Aggies' weekend series rotation. All signs point to Stilson being drafted in the first round of the MLB draft this year.

"Stilson was so good in the bullpen last year, but I think he has the ability to make you feel pretty bad about yourself on Friday, Saturday and Sunday after you see him on a Friday night," Childress said. "I feel like we have some great pieces to the puzzle. We just need to know where to place them."

Also moving in to a full-time starting role is Louisville Slugger Freshman All-America Michael Wacha. The sophomore right-hander went 9-2 with a 2.90 ERA and 97 strikeouts in a team-leading 105.2 innings in 2010. The first freshman since Jason Meyers to win nine games in a season, Wacha is one of the top young pitchers in the country and is already projected to go in the early rounds of the 2012 draft.

Ross Stripling, despite two rough starts against Miami, is a key pitcher for Coach Childress' plans this spring. He

was 6-5 with a 4.50 ERA and 89 strikeouts in 88 innings last year. He could be a full-time starter or may assume the same kind of swing role that Wacha had last year. He also has a chance to inherit the closer role from Stilson. His versatility is one of the key reasons that Stilson can move to the Friday night starting slot.

A big key to the season is the return of 2009 Freshman All-American **Ross Hales** from a shoulder injury. Picking up a redshirt last season after appearing in just two games, the hard throwing lefty has regained his confidence and the velocity that led to his 6-2 freshman season. Hales struck out 76 in 76 innings and posted a 4.11 ERA, but his three-hit shutout in Austin over Texas showed how good he can be. He progressed well in the fall and was again pitching in the nineties as spring practice started.

"I think Hales has continued to make strides and is getting ready for a great year," Childress said.

Those four pitchers could start Friday to Tuesday and match any team in the nation, but the bullpen must dominate the final innings to keep Stilson and Stripling in the starting rotation. Their names might not be familiar to the casual fan, but Coach Childress is counting on pitchers who were limited in appearances, but not talent to account for those innings. Two lefties, junior **Estevan Uriegas** and sophomore **Dylan Mendoza**, took advantage of the summer season to pick up confidence and both will have expanded roles this spring. Uriegas looks to regain his freshman form and will be used against more than just left-handed hitters this year. Mendoza was in a similar spot last year, but could also start if Stripling is in the bullpen.

Three right-handers that have started in summer ball could win the closing job. Senior **Nick Fleece** was the top returning prospect from the Texas Collegiate League this summer and went 1-2 with a 3.76 ERA last year. He needs to return to the 2009 form that saw him win the closer job. Senior **Steven Martin** was a star at the plate and as a reliever this summer in the MINK league and has the ammunition to close games this year. He can hit the mid-nineties and flashed a great breaking ball this summer. Senior **Joaquin Hinojosa**, a JUCO and TCL all-star before splitting time on the mound and outfield last year will

focus on pitching this spring and could also finish games. Sophomores **Denny Clement** and **Jake Feckley** are returning from injury, but have earned the coaches trust when healthy and throwing strikes. Another sophomore, **Kyle Martin**, is changing to a much lower arm slot and has great deception against right-handed hitters.

Two newcomers to watch are **Brandon Parrent** and **Luke Maloy**. The left-handed Parrent was the top pitcher at Temple JC last year with an 11-6 record and earned both of their wins at the JUCO World Series. The right-handed Maloy was the San Antonio High School Player of the Year and went 12-1 with a 1.81 ERA and 127 strikeouts in 81 in-



nings for Alamo Heights before being drafted in the 47th round last year by Cleveland.

THE LINEUP

Losing first-team All-Big 12 selection Brodie Greene – the Aggies' most valuable player in 2010 and triple crown winner – will be nearly impossible to replace after he hit .395-14-55 and stole 23 bases. The veteran shortstop became the highest drafted senior position player when Cincinnati took him in the fourth round. Also lost were lineup regulars Joe Patterson (.348-9-48) and Caleb Shofner (.331-6-35). Those three players accounted for 43 percent of the team's home runs and 38 percent of the runs batted in from 2010.

Returning players are battling new-

comers for the other six spots in the Aggie lineup. Two returners earned second team All-Big 12 honors in 2010 – junior infielder **Matt Juengel** and senior catcher **Kevin Gonzalez**. Juengel finished second on the team with a .359 average, 11 home runs and 39 RBI, and he was the leading hitter in Big 12 play. He is coming off a great summer and is poised for a terrific junior year. Juengel is in a battle to start at third, but his bat will be in the lineup regardless.

A four-year starter, Gonzalez continues to improve each and every year. In 2010, he hit .318 with nine home runs and 38 RBI. No team in the country has a better catcher in calling a game, blocking the plate or leading a defense. With senior **Gregg Alcazar** (.418-2-11) backing up Gonzalez, both catchers can stay fresh and be ready for the long season.

Junior **Adam Smith** cut down on his strikeouts last year and hit .268-10-42 while spending time at shortstop and second base. Coming off arm surgery, Smith is trying to recapture the shortstop position that he manned in 2009. The pro scouts love his athleticism and his improvement at the plate each year. Senior **Kenny Jackson** is the Aggies best defensive infielder and can play any position on the dirt. He started the 2010 season hot before finishing .263-0-9, but was much better at the plate this fall.

After spending the majority of the time in the outfield last year, senior **Andrew Collazo** (.245-3-22) and junior **Scott Arthur** (.218-0-8) are competing for slots in the infield in 2011. Collazo might have the inside track on third base, especially if he shows the same kind of improvement that Dane Carter, Darby Brown and Brian Ruggiano had with huge jumps in batting average during their second year in major college baseball. Arthur is as fast as any player in the Big 12 and needs to put the ball in play and use his tools to his advantage.

"With the new bats limiting exit speed you are not going to be able to cover up an error you made in the third inning with a five-run sixth," Childress said. "So we have to be much better defensively."

The outfield has two exciting sophomores looking to crack the lineup. Ty **Naquin** started slow last year but was able to raise his average up nearly 100 points as the year went along. He finished the year hitting .244-2-19 near the top



of the lineup. As exciting as he is at the plate, he has the ability to change a game defensively with as strong an arm as any outfielder has had in a while in maroon and white. Naquin had eight assists last year before opponents stopped running against him. He wrestled the starting role away from **Brandon Wood** (.206-0-8), but Wood led the team in home runs this past fall using the new bats. Wood has transformed himself into a player that will be hard to keep out of the lineup.

There are several newcomers competing for a starting job entering the season. **Jacob House** transferred from Arkansas and spent last season watching from the stands. He hit .260-2-15 at Arkansas in 2009 and is trying to win the first base job this year. Steven Miller could also factor into the everyday lineup at first base but if he is going to have a major role on the mound it will likely limit his time at the plate. **Krey Bratsen**, **Charlie Curl** and **Jace Statum** are pushing returning players as well as each other for expanded rolls in the lineup. All three have speed and force the action on the base paths. Bratsen was targeted by MLB scouts early in his high school career and turned down a chance to play pro ball to patrol the outfield at Olsen. Statum is pushing Bratsen and Wood for a starting spot in the outfield and gives the coaches another left-handed hitter to balance the lineup. Curl was the most improved player this past fall and will factor into the infield mix with Arthur, Collazo, Jackson and Smith.

"Our returning sophomores had amazing falls for us in the outfield and Wood might have been our best player," Chil-

dress said. "Naquin was our leading hitter and the two of them led from the front. We are very excited about the freshmen. They are going to be a force for us on the base paths and get plenty of opportunities to play."

SAWDOG'S RETURN

For the second straight year Coach Childress has had to make a change to his coaching staff when it was announced that Matt Deggs was stepping down as associate head coach early in January. Quite frankly the Aggies were lucky that they were quickly able to hire Andy Sawyers away from Kansas State to run the Aggie offensive attack with the same emphasis on speed, base running and aggressiveness that Deggs recruited for. Sawyers will coordinate the Aggie hitters in addition to working with the team's catchers defensively.

"Sawdog" was a fan favorite as a volunteer assistant and first base coach during the 2008 season, helping the Aggies capture a Big 12 Championship and advance to an NCAA Super Regional. In his two-year stint at Kansas State, Sawyers

"With the new bats limiting exit speed you are not going to be able to cover up an error you made in the third inning with a five-run sixth. So we have to be much better defensively."

AD COACH ROB CHILDRESS

transformed the Wildcat offense into one of the best in the Big 12 and led the team to their first postseason appearances in school history. Despite significant graduation losses, his offense led the Big 12 in batting average and steals in 2010, as well as finishing second in the league with 448 runs scored and 414 RBI. The Wildcats led the conference in batting average and steals in both years, hitting .323 in 2010 and .317 in 2009.

"It was important for me to find someone to step into that position that we were familiar with as player and coaches," Childress said. "It was also important for the new coach to know what the program's expectations are, what our approach is offensively and our philosophy. He did an amazing job at Kansas State."

Under Sawyers, the Aggie offense should continue to thrive in the pressure attack, and with the new bats cutting

down offensive power numbers across the country, the small ball game is going to be increasingly popular across the sport.

THE SCHEDULE

Once again the state of Texas and the Big 12 is loaded with talent and are garnering high preseason rankings. TCU, returning their complete weekend rotation, earned a No. 1 ranking by two publications following a 54-14 season that ended in Omaha at the College World Series. Matt Purke went 16-0 last year and is again projected to be a first-round draft pick this summer. They are similar to A&M in that their only real question is in their bullpen. At the plate they are led by outfielder Jason Coats (.361-13-69) and six other regulars that batted .293 or better last year.

Oklahoma enters this year as the highest rated Big 12 team and like TCU they return seven everyday starters from last year's lineup that advanced to the College World Series. Third-baseman Garrett Buechele returns after being drafted following a .359-17-65 season and four other returning players also had double figure home run totals last year. The pitching staff is led by Bobby Shore (10-5 4.12 ERA).

When Big 12 pitcher of the year Cole Green (11-2, 2.74) returned to Texas, he gave a talented pitching staff a great boost. When matched with Taylor Jungmann (8-3, 2.03), few teams in the country can match their talent on the weekend. Tant Shepherd (.337-8-35) and Cohl Walla (.316-8-40) are the two top hitters on a team built for Augie Garrido's small ball attack.

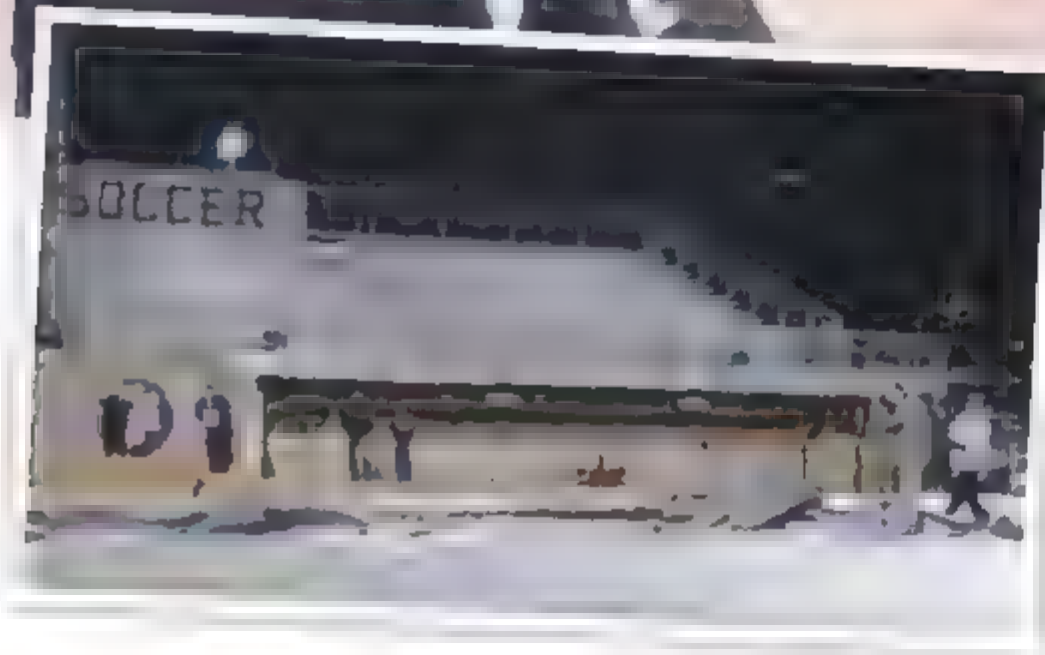
Rice again will lead Conference USA and fight for a regional host spot. Anthony Rendon is the top player in the country and led the college ranks with a .396-26-85 season at the plate in 2010. Teamed with outfielders Jeremy Rathjen (.317-13-69) and Michael Fuda (.346-7-45), the Owls have a power-packed lineup that will need to carry the load until a talented but inexperienced pitching staff is ready for conference play.

Baylor has also earned some preseason mention, and they could be a dark horse candidate if a sophomore-laden lineup can improve from last year. If Logan Verrett (5-3, 3.28) can turn some of his no decisions into victories, the Bears can improve their position in the Big 12. **M**

MAY vs. MCCONNELL


The record-setting sophomore slugger accepts a home run derby challenge from AI's associate/photo editor

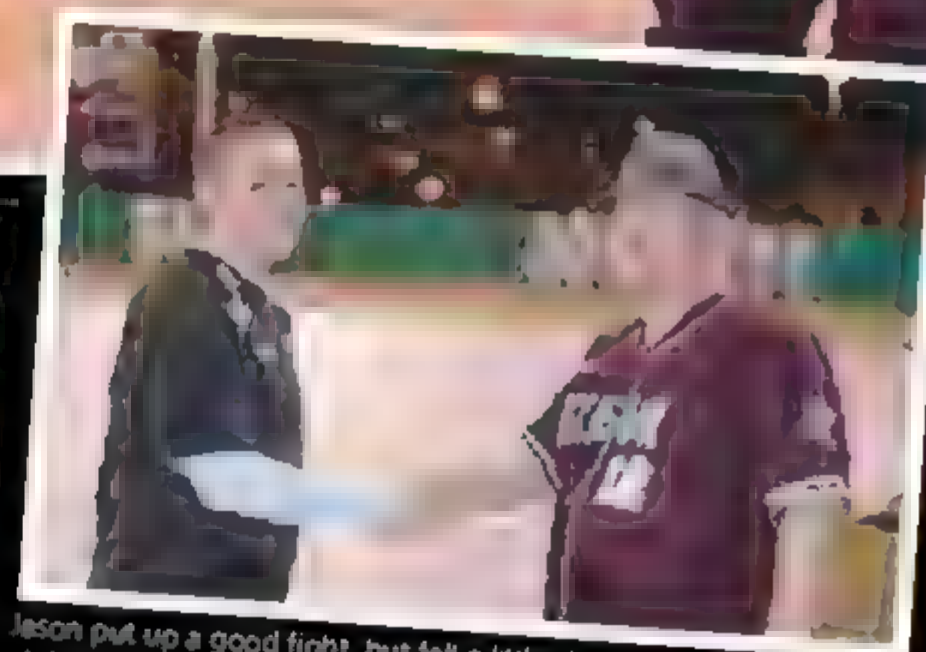
BY AI STAFF



After postponing for a week due to a rare influx of snow and ice in Aggieland, AI's Jason McConnell finally got his chance to go toe-to-toe with Aggie softball sophomore Meagan May in the first AI home run derby. They braved the high winds as another cold front blew into College Station during the contest. Yes, if you were wondering, those winds were blowing out, but May didn't need any help blasting softballs well out of the park.

To summarize the home run derby, here is May vs. McConnell by the numbers:

TEN extra pitches to Jason as he got closer and closer to the ever-elusive home run ball. **NINE** hits out of the infield by Jason. **EIGHT** home runs by Meagan out of 15 swings – wow. **SEVEN** degrees that the temperature must have dropped during the 20-minute contest. **SIX** days of complaining by one of the photographers who took a line drive off the forearm from Jason. **FIVE** sudden gusts of wind that undoubtedly affected Jason's hits. **FOUR** AI staff members (Jeremy, Macy, Mindy and Brian) necessary to capture the home run derby by still and video camera. **THREE** deep drives by Jason to the base of the center field wall. **TWO** hits by Meagan that would have been homers if they weren't foul. **ONE** huge thank you to Coach Jo Evans, Coach Mary Jo Firnbach, Stephen Grove, Meredith Collier, Meagan May and the rest of the Texas A&M softball program for making the AI home run derby possible. And finally, **ZERO** home runs by Jason, however he did fare a lot better than expected. 



Visit www.agglemag.com and watch the complete video of the May vs. McConnell home run derby on AI's YouTube channel.

Jason put up a good fight, but fell a little short as Meagan blasted eight home runs in 15 swings to his zero.



FARMERS

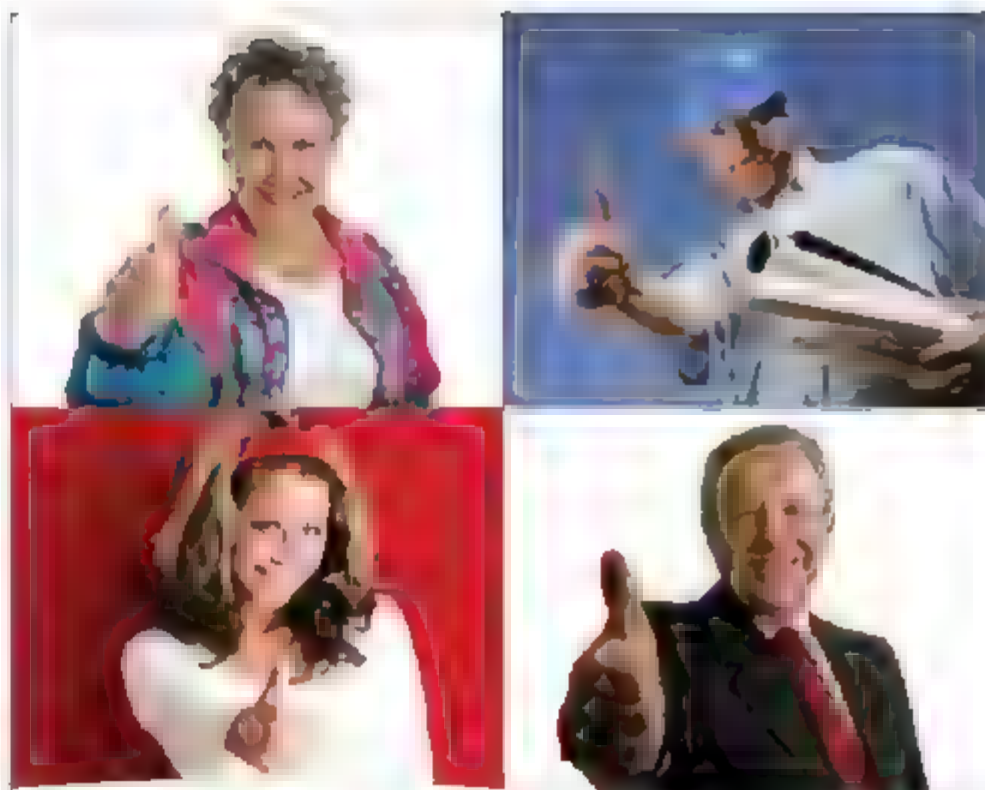
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QUESTIONS FOR MEAGAN MAY

By A. STAFF

How are you feeling about this season?

I am feeling great about this season. I am excited to be a part of the team and to represent the university. I am looking forward to the challenges ahead and to the opportunity to grow as a player and as a person.

Were you surprised by the amount of success you had as a freshman last season?

I was not surprised by the amount of success I had as a freshman last season. I knew I was capable of doing well and I just tell them to be confident. I am proud of the team and of the individual accomplishments.

How difficult was the recovery from your accident last summer?

The recovery from my accident last summer was difficult. I had to learn to walk again and I had to learn to live with the pain. But I am grateful for the support of my family and friends and for the opportunity to return to the team.

Do you feel like you have a different outlook on softball now?

I do feel like I have a different outlook on softball now. I am more confident and I am more determined. I am ready to take on whatever challenges come my way.

What are some of the new faces on the team this year?

Some of the new faces on the team this year are [names]. They are all talented players and I am excited to have them on the team. They will bring a lot of energy and skill to the team.

Have you looked at this year's schedule?

I have looked at this year's schedule and I am excited about the challenges ahead. We are going to play some tough teams and I am ready to take on the challenge.

What are your personal goals this season?


My personal goals this season are to improve my batting average and to increase my number of home runs. I want to be a more complete player and to contribute more to the team.

What would make this season a success?

What would make this season a success is if we can win a national championship. I want to see the team succeed and I want to be a part of that success.

How would you describe your first All home run derby?

It was fun. I was able to hit a lot of home runs and I was able to show off my skills. It was a great experience and I am looking forward to doing it again.



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Meet the "Aggie Men" of Watercrest at Bryan



Q&A with David Busbee, Chuck Gates, James Boone, Chuck Samson, and Jim Stocker

Why did you choose Watercrest at Bryan and what do you like best about living here?

James: My wife died in 2004 and our four bedroom house was too much for me to maintain. I looked at ads and saw that there were three bedrooms available and that was my selling point. I needed the space, but not as much as I was living in. I like not having to cook my meals! I love the big lunches at Watercrest. I have tons of friends and neighbors and I love having them always here. I also like that skilled nursing and assisted living are next door. A&M people stick close together and participate in athletic events. There's a good mix of alumni and out of state people. I also like that Watercrest sets up screens in the dining room to watch games and many residents still attend!

Jim: As my wife and I began to age, we wanted to be in a place where health services were available should we need them. I like the group of Aggies that live here. I was a professor at Texas A&M in 1967. I also like that our children are happy that we live here and think it's the right place for us.

Chuck S.: Watercrest is attractive and had accommodations that suited our needs. We also knew people here and we loved the "active adult" lifestyle. We're still very involved in the community. I love that the building is very attractive. I love how friendly everyone is. I love attending parties like Oktoberfest and Halloween. I enjoy watching all of the A&M sports and am very active in alumni associations.

David: My wife chose it! I'm the newcomer, but so far, so good!

Chuck G.: I'm with David. The Boss (my wife) chose it. I've learned that in life, I'm happy when she's happy. I like that it's near A&M!

Get to know the Aggie men of Watercrest and experience the newest in active adult living. A gated community in the prestigious Park Hudson district, Watercrest at Bryan is a destination for those seeking a spirited, care-free lifestyle featuring luxurious apartment homes; customizable lifestyle service packages; optional meal and housekeeping plans; plus events, trips, dances, and get-togethers. Call about our free moving services. Prices starting at \$1,100.

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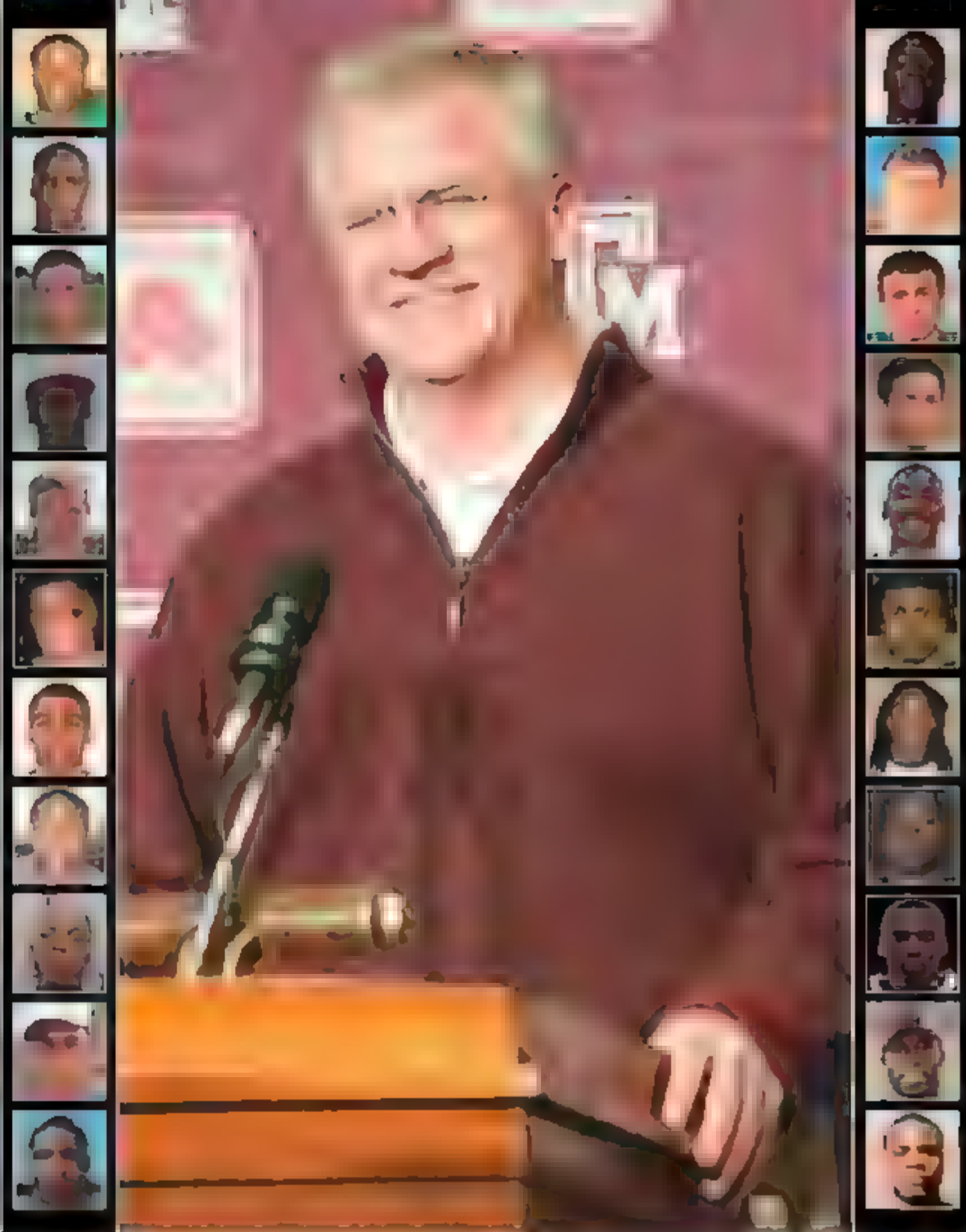

WATERCREST
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MEET THE NEW CLASS

Mike Sherman and the Aggie coaching staff sign 22 in the 2011 football recruiting class

BY JEREMY KSIONDA '04



If you check the national recruiting services and take the opinions of all the so-called "experts" around the country, you probably won't be overly enamored with the Aggies' signing class of 2011. But if you listen to Texas A&M head coach Mike Sherman talk about the group, you'd think it was a top ten haul. The truth, as usual, probably lies somewhere in the middle.

If you grade this class in terms of how it fills needs on the A&M roster, it unanimously scores much higher. Other than running back, the Aggies restocked the pipeline at positions of need, such as linebacker and defensive back. And at nose guard – a key position in the 3-4 defense – the Ags picked up what Coach Sherman refers to as a sure-fire NFL player.

Before we take a closer look at the rest of the class, here are our annual class superlatives:

OFFENSIVE MVP

QB Johnny Manziel

When your incoming quarterback is a Parade All-American who rewrote the record books in Texas high school football, this pick becomes a no-brainer. Already enrolled at A&M, Manziel will wow with his playmaking ability.

RUNNER-UP

OL Joseph Cheek

In true Coach Sherman fashion, one of the most highly touted

members of the offensive class happens to be an offensive lineman. Jake Matthews and Luke Joeckel received co-MVP awards from us last year, so Cheek is in good company.

DEFENSIVE MVP

DT LaMarc Strahan

The Aggies finished strong on the defensive side of the ball to close out the class, but agile, 6-5, 365-pound defensive tackles who are perfect for the 3-4 defense don't grow on trees. The nod has to go to Strahan here.

RUNNERS-UP

LB Brandon Alexander, LB Shaun Ward, DB Floyd Raven

It became so difficult to make a choice between these three that we eventually just stopped trying. Each candidate presented such a strong case: Alexander was a head-to-head victory in recruiting over Mack Brown; Ward is the heir apparent to Von Miller; and Raven was an SEC-caliber talent who chose to take his talents to the Big 12. In our opinion, you can't go wrong with any of them.

SLEEPER AWARD

WR Mike Evans

As we detail in the wide receiver section, Evans is only scratching the surface of his potential on the gridiron. The Aggie coaches feel they got a steal here and so do we.



"It's a great opportunity for me and I feel it's the best fit for me. I'm coming in at a time where the program is going nowhere but up and to get a great education on top of all of it, which is really going to help me out down the road. I'm very excited and can't wait to get there."

QUARTERBACK (1)

In a down year for quarterbacks in the state of Texas, the Aggies feel like they got their man in Kerrville Tivy's **Johnny Manziel** (6-1, 180, Tivy HS). A couple of nationally ranked out-of-state signal callers flirted with the Aggies for a while, but Arizona QB Brett Hundley elected to stay in Pac 10 territory and JUCO transfer Zack Mettenberger's desire to seek revenge on Georgia kept him in the SEC as he selected LSU.

Manziel was set to go to Oregon before the Aggies came calling and plucked the Parade All-American right out of the hands

of the Ducks. The Ags have already agreed to let Johnny work out at both wide receiver and quarterback, much like they did with Ryan Tannehill. Like Tannehill, Manziel is simply too good of an athlete to keep off the field. Many experts projected him as a slot receiver or possibly a safety at the next level all along, but after an absolutely mind boggling senior year, there's no question that Manziel deserves a good, long look at quarterback.

The only real knocks against Manziel are his size, arm strength and lack of "prototypical" quarterback attributes. You know, the same thing the "experts" said about Drew Brees, Chase Daniel and Doug Flutie. The Ags passed on Brees out of Austin Westlake, and it looks like they certainly don't want to make the same mistake twice. Manziel enrolled at Texas A&M in January and will participate in 2011 spring drills with the Aggies.

Johnny Manziel is the son of Michelle and Paul Manziel of Kerrville, Texas. He was born Dec. 6, 1992 ... Manziel is pronounced M.A.N.-zeal ... 2008: 717 rushing yards and 12 TD's; 59-of-88 passing for 922 yards and 10 TD's and 0 INT's; 19 receptions for 287 yards and 1 TD ... 2009: 218 of 356 passing for 2,903 yards with 19 TD's and 5 INT's; 242 carries for 1,544 yards and 34 TD's; 5 receptions for 152 yards and 2 TD's. All San Antonio Area Offensive Player of the Year (San Antonio Express-News); District 27-4.1 MVP ... 2010: 228 of 347 (65.7%) passing for 3,609 yards with 45 TD's and 5 INT's; 170 carries for 1,674 yards and 30 TD's; 1 TD reception, 1 kickoff return for a TD; Parade All-American; District 28-4.1 MVP (unanimous selection); 4.1 Offensive Player of the Year; 4.1 First Team All-State (4P); SA Express-News Offensive Player of the Year; Sub-5A First Team All-Area (SA Express-News); No. 1 QB in Texas by Dave Campbell's Texas Football; DCTF Top 300; PrepStar All-Region; Superprep All-Region (chose the Ags over Oregon and Stanford)

RUNNING BACK (1)

With the departure of Calvin Guyton at the beginning of the season and Bradley Stephens electing to forego his senior year to pursue a career opportunity back home, the Aggies found themselves in need of at least two running backs in this class. Unfortunately, they fell short with priority targets such as Kenny Williams (Texas Tech) and Brandon Williams (OU). The Ags did manage to secure the signature of **Will Randolph** (5-9, 175, Copperas Cove HS), however, and already have a couple of versatile commitments for the class of 2012 who could play running



back or linebacker.

In Randolph, the Ags picked up a slightly undersized back with speed to kill. Like current Aggie running back Cyrus Gray, Randolph possesses the ability to make one cut and take it to the house. Copperas Cove head coach Jack Welch describes Randolph as "explosive." He will probably be used on special teams early on in his Aggie career because of his pure speed and play-making ability.

Will Randolph was born Jan. 26, 1992 ... his guardian is Shanell Watson of Killeen, Texas ... 2009: 29 carries for 142 yards and 2 TD's ... 2010: 146 carries for 1,117 yards and 19 TD's; 11 punts and punt return for a TD; Killeen Daily Herald First Team All-League; 12 5.A First Team All District (unanimous selection). Killeen Daily Herald Player of the Week after lead 21-17 win over Bryan

WIDE RECEIVER (2)

The Aggies took a hit late in the recruiting season when long-time commit Jonathon Henderson got into legal trouble and lost his scholarship. Fortunately, they were able to add Baytown's **Chance Nelson (5-10, 170, Sterling HS)** to their haul late in the process. Nelson did just about everything during his high school career, playing quarterback as a senior, and both running back and receiver as a junior. Though he might not jump off the page with statistics or measurements, the A&M coaches love Nelson's ability to run precise routes, his sure hands and unyielding work ethic.

"I'm very excited. I've always wanted to play in the Big 12 and I've always been an Aggie fan. This opportunity came and I couldn't pass it up. This has been my dream since I was younger and I can't wait to help build this program."

Chance Nelson is the son of Von Nelson of Baytown, Texas ... born Feb. 26, 1993 ... 2008: 25 catches for 439 yards (13.7 average) and 4 TD's ... 2009: 34 carries for 287 yards and 5 TD's ... 2010: 133 passing for 919 yards and 10 TD's; 172 carries for 1,111 yards and 16 TD's; 21-5.A First Team All-District

If there's a "sleeper" in this year's class, it's probably Galveston wideout **Mike Evans (6-5, 180, Ball HS)**. Evans wasn't on anyone's radar going into his senior season, but it wasn't for his lack of ability. You see, Evans played football as a freshman, but decided to concentrate on basketball as a sophomore and junior. By the time his senior year rolled around, Evans decided that he wanted to participate in all sports. After a successful senior campaign on the gridiron, he caught the attention of the A&M coaching staff. Evans' leaping ability and knack of catching the ball at its peak will serve him well during his time in Aggieland, and the coaches are anxious to see what type of player he can become.

Mike Evans was born Aug. 21, 1993. 2010: 25 receptions for 648 yards and 1 TD; 2 INT's on defense; 24-4.A Second Team All-District ... Evans is also a basketball player for the Jors, Evans is averaging 18.5 points per game as a senior ... 24.5 time in the 40-yard dash at football camp ... Chose the Aggies over Tulane



"I think the Aggie ring will mean more to me than a Super Bowl ring, if I ever get one of those. It's huge. When you walk around and see someone with an Aggie ring, it gives you a membership to the network of hundreds of thousands of Aggies."

OFFENSIVE LINE (3)

If there's one area you'll never see us question Mike Sherman's evaluations, it's along the offensive line. After last season's o-line haul to remember, most Aggie fans would have been happy with a light load in 2011. If you consider three linemen who weigh a combined 871 pounds a "light load," then be our guest.

Joseph Cheek (6-7, 271, Seguin HS) was the first member of the class of 2011, as the Aggie legacy (son of former Aggie offensive lineman Louis Cheek) accepted an "unofficial" scholarship offer from Mike Sherman during his sophomore year of high school. One of the most highly ranked members of the class, Cheek participated in the Army All-American Bowl in January, becoming the second consecutive year in which a future Aggie was selected to play in the prestigious contest. Standing tall at 6-7 and a lean 271 pounds, Cheek's best days are ahead of him after some time in Coach Kennedy's strength and conditioning program. Cheek enrolled at Texas A&M in January and will participate in 2011 spring drills with the Aggies.

Joseph Daniel Cheek is the son of Louis and Suzanne Cheek of Seguin, Texas ... born Dec. 2, 1992 ... 2009: Second Team All-Centex (Austin American Statesman); 4-A Third Team All-State (TSWA); Sub-5.1 First Team All-Area (SA Express News); 27-4-A First Team All-District ... 2010: Graded 85 percent, 24 pancakes, 1 sack allowed; 5.1 All-State Honorable Mention (AP); 5.1 First Team All-Area (SA Express News); Second Team All-Centex (Austin American Statesman); USA Football All-American; District Champion; Texas Football Super Team (Second Team); DCTI Top 300; PrepStar All-Region; Superprep All-Region. Cheek committed to the Aggies early over Stanford and Oklahoma. He is the son of former Aggie Louis Cheek, who played for the Aggies under Jackie Sherrill from 1984-87 and played on three Southwest Conference Championship teams. He was an eighth round selection of the Miami Dolphins in 1988 and played four seasons in the NFL.

Another long-time A&M pledge, **Nathan Gutekunst (6-6, 290, Atascocita HS)**, fits the mold of the tall, rangy and mobile interior line prospects that Sherman covets. Gutekunst flew under the radar among the recruiting services, probably due to his very early commitment to the Aggies, but will be a solid contributor to Jim Turner's unit.

Nathan Gutekunst is the son of Nyla and Rick Gutekunst of Humble, Texas ... born Nov. 21, 1992. Gutekunst is pronounced: goot-eb-kunst ... 2009: 19-5.1 First Team All-District ... 2010: 14-5.1 First Team All-District; DCTI Campbell's Texas Football Super Team (Second Team); DCTI Top 300; PrepStar All-Region; Superprep All-Region. He chose the Aggies over Stanford.

Rice, Kentucky and Baylor.

The Aggies easily could have been done with just a two-man haul this year, but the emergence and development of **Ben Compton (6-4, 310, Friendswood HS)** caused them to reach out and add one more member to their impressive haul. Originally verbally committed to Rice, Compton couldn't resist the Aggie offer when it came his direction. When you watch him on film, Compton jumps out as a player with a real shot at earning early playing time when he arrives in Aggieland. Some insiders have him pegged as a potential replacement for Matt Allen at center as early as next season.

Benjamin Anthony Compton is the son of Mike and Mary Compton of Friendswood, Texas ... born Nov. 20, 1992 ... 2010: Graded 90 percent, 23 pancakes, 1 sack allowed in 293 pass attempts; 4-A First Team All-State (AP); Second Team All-Greater Houston (Houston Chronicle); 24-4-A First Team All-District; PrepStar All-Region. An excellent student, Compton chose the Aggies over Rice.

DEFENSIVE LINE (2)

When it comes to the 3-4 defense, it all truly starts up front with the big men in the middle. Though the Ags missed out on early targets such as Cedric Reed and Quincy Russell (Texas), it could have been a blessing in disguise. Signing those future Longhorns would have filled valuable spots in A&M's class, and at the end of the day we're absolutely certain they wouldn't trade their d-line haul with their rivals over in Austin.

If there's a cornerstone in this class, both literally and figura-





SHAUN WARD (LB)
Bowd Anderson HS (Fl. Lauderdale, FL)

"It's amazing to be a part of a defense called the Wrecking Crew. It's not just a nickname, it's a description, and everyone knows that when the Wrecking Crew is back, it's going to be a wrap for a lot of offenses."

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Next to Strahan, the big man with the most upside might be **Shayvion Hatten (6-4, 250, Daingerfield HS)**. The one-time TCU commit fell in love with the Aggies and their vision for him at defensive end, and never wavered on his commitment to A&M despite late interest from Texas. Coming from a 1A program, albeit a powerhouse, Hatten will likely need a year or two to develop, but will make a big push to man one of the vacant end spots left by Tony Jerod-Eddie and Jonathan Mathis after next season.

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LINEBACKER (6)

This where it starts to get fun. The Aggies inked six – count ‘em – SIX linebackers in this year’s class, half of which are very likely to contribute as true freshmen. One of those early contributors is expected to be Shaun Ward (6-2, 225, Boyd Anderson HS) out of Florida, whose skillset is similar to Aggie legend Von Miller’s. Comparing Ward to Miller probably isn’t fair at this point, but the sunshine state sensation’s friendship with Miller and his desire to wear No. 40 in maroon and white next season will make it impossible to ignore the similarities. Of course, if he’s as good as expected, Ward will be able to emerge out of Miller’s mighty shadow.

Scott, W. A. d. n. e. a. n. t. s. h. y. d. r. a. l. R. N.
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INT returned for TD, 2 fumble recoveries, including 1 for TD, PrepStar All-Region ... Chose the Aggies over Florida, USC, West Virginia and several others

Also expected to come in and compete right away at the rush linebacker spot is Brenham defensive end **Brandon Alexander** (6-6, 240, Brenham HS). Alexander's commitment came on the eve of signing day, and was a major coup for Mike Sherman, Terrell Williams and Nick Toth on the recruiting trail, going toe to toe with Mack Brown for the playmaker's signature and emerging victorious. Alexander might have more upside than any other player in the class, as the 6-6, 240-pound terror around the edge only began playing football during his junior year of high school. Though he's expected to eventually grow into a prototypical defensive end, Alexander has the potential to make the same impact that true freshman Damontre Moore made this season.

Brandon Alexander played only one season at Brenham ... is also a standout basketball player. 2010: 59 tackles, 5 sacks, 1 fumble recovery, 1 TD, First Team All-District ... Chose the Aggies over Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma State, Texas Tech and several others.

Another Texan, **Donnie Baggs** (6-1, 205, Clear Springs HS), flew quietly under the radar his senior year, as a nagging ankle injury kept him from playing at 100 percent. Baggs was one of the first linebackers offered by Mike Sherman and his staff, and is expected to slide inside to middle linebacker from the outside spot he manned in high school. An intelligent, physical player, Baggs shouldn't have any problem making the move. Like four others in this class, Baggs enrolled at Texas A&M in January and will participate in 2011 spring drills with the Aggies.

"It's been a long road for me, but it's great now. I just have to keep telling myself that I have to do, whatever I have to do, to get there and it has paid off so far. It's a blessing for me to be in College Station, playing for a rising program. It's a dream come true."

—Donnie Baggs

Donnie Baggs is the son of Donna and Nathaniel Baggs of League City, Texas ... born Dec. 1, 1992 ... 2008: 19 tackles, 2 interceptions, 1 fumble recovery; 2009: 101 tackles (48 unassisted), 14 tackles for sacks, 4 interceptions, 2 fumble recoveries, 27 quarterback hurries; 2010: 57 tackles, 1 sack, 24-54 First Team All-District; Dave Campbell All-County Second Team (Second team); No. 6 LB, Texas A&M Clear Springs ... Chose the Aggies over Missouri, Kansas State, Baylor and several others.

Just up the road from Clear Springs, **Tyrell Taylor** (6-4, 205, Galena Park HS) was making a name for himself as a senior in Houston. The 6-4 pass-rushing extraordinaire is somewhat cut from the same mold as Alexander, as he could probably grow into a defensive end down the road. In fact, Taylor would line up as an end in a three-man front for Galena Park last season and combine with his brother Tyrone (also an A&M commit for 2012) to provide a staunch pass-rushing tandem. Could some "blitz brothers" be on the horizon for the Wrecking Crew? It certainly looks that way.

Tyrell Taylor is the son of Kimberly Taylor of Galena Park, Texas.

born Dec. 7, 1992
2009: 70 tackles, 9 sacks,
7 caused fumbles, 1 blocked
punt returned for a TD
2010: 65 tackles, 17 sacks,
3 caused fumbles, 1 blocked
punt returned for a TD
19-4-1 Defensive Co-MVP

One of two signing day surprises, Darzil Washington (6-3, 226, West St. John HS) picked up an offer after taking an official visit to Aggieland the weekend before signing day. Though he was not the most heralded member of the class, Washington's combination of size and range should enable him to fit in at a number of positions once he gets on campus. Make no mistake, however, Washington is a linebacker first and foremost and will definitely get a chance to fill a huge gap at one of the inside positions that currently don't have much depth on the Aggie roster.

Darzil Washington played just one year at West St. John HS in Edgard, La. after transferring from Haberville HS ... 2010: 123 total tackles, 14 QB sacks, 30 tackles for loss, 5 forced fumbles, 3 INTs, 2 INT returns for TD ... *Football Digest* 8-1-1, First-team All St. John Parish

Last but not least, junior college transfer Steven Jenkins (6-2, 205, Coffeyville CC) rounds out the Aggies' linebacker haul. Originally from Pensacola, Fla., Jenkins possesses that speed and closing ability that's so coveted among the collegiate ranks. When you watch Jenkins on film, you see a player who can hut like a ton of bricks despite his smaller frame. Although he's slightly undersized, Jenkins' speed and experience should give him the inside track to replace Michael Hodges in the starting lineup this spring. Jenkins enrolled at Texas A&M in January and will participate in 2011 spring drills with the Aggies.

2010: 91 tackles, 17 TFL, 6 sacks, 5 PBU, 4 forced fumbles, 1 blocked FG, 1 TD; No. 20 JUCO by Scout24.com

DEFENSIVE BACK (5)

To prepare for the departure of three seniors in the secondary next season, it was imperative that the Aggies built depth using this recruiting class. With four of the five commitments possessing the ability to play both corner and safety, Tim DeRuyter and his defensive staff have to feel good about the unit's future.

Arlington's Devonta Burns (6-0, 200, Martin HS) was one of A&M's first targets for the 2011 class. Burns is the type of tall,



rangy safety prospect that the Ags haven't had a lot of success signing the past few years. While his ability to drop into coverage and defend the pass is just fine thanks to his exceptional football IQ, where Burns really excels is around the line of scrimmage and against the run.

Devonta Burns (DB) Martin HS (Arlington, TX) ... son of Sammie and Lorraine Burns of Arlington, Texas ... born Aug. 1, 1993 ... 2009: 102 tackles, 3 sacks, 2 INTs, 1 fumble recovery ... 2010: 69 tackles, 2 sacks, 2 PBU, 2 fumbles caused; 4-5-1 First Team All-District; No. 3 Safety in Texas by *Dallas Courier*; Texas Football PrepStar All Region ... Superprep All Region ... Chosen the Aggies over Iowa, UCLA, Purdue and several others

Though he's not quite as thick as Burns, Deshazor Everett (6-0, 170, DeRidder HS) is cut from a very similar mold. A fast, physical playmaker, Everett had

an absolutely sensational senior season in Louisiana. According to his high school coach, Everett possesses great "football speed," meaning he doesn't lose any speed when all the pads are on. Fast enough to play corner and physical enough to play safety, Deshazor is the type of player every defensive coordinator wants in his secondary.

Deshazor Everett was born Feb. 22, 1992 ... his guardian is Monica and Joseph Bolden of DeRidder, La. ... 2009: 76 tackles, 4 tackles for loss, 2 interceptions, 5 blocked kicks; 4-1 First Team All State (AP) ... 2010: 150 tackles, 10 TFL, 5 QB pressures, 3 sacks, 1 interception; on offense, he rushed for 618 yards and 7 TDs on 117 carries (5.6 yards per carry); 4-1 All State Honorable Mention (AP); PrepStar All Region, No. 27 in Louisiana by Superprep ... Chosen the Aggies over Arkansas, Ole Miss and Missouri

The Aggies decided to dip into the JUCO ranks in hopes of finding a more experience and "ready-made" player to plug into

"I've wanted to go to A&M since my freshman year when I went down there to a game with one of my friends. I can't wait to get down there. I'm really excited about all of it, but at the end of the day, I know that I have to stay focused on what I'm there for - football and school."

JONIA B.

"Howard Matthews can make you look like a fool in a split second. He can do just about anything on the field. He's played defensive tackle, linebacker, safety – he's a freak in basketball and track. He can probably kick the football too, I haven't seen it, but I bet he can. There's not much he can't do."

the pipeline. They think they found just that in **Johntel Franklin** (6-2, 200, Victory Valley CC). A little known commodity coming out of high school, Franklin decided to take his talent to the JUCO ranks to prove his abilities to college coaches. He seems to have gotten their attention, picking up offers from Ole Miss, Arizona State and Oklahoma State before electing to sign with the Aggies. A midterm enrollee, Franklin is already on campus and will push for second string reps in the secondary, hoping to gain a starting role in 2012.

Johntel Franklin is the son of (deceased) ... Sept. 24, 1991 ... Franklin origin ... of Madison High School in Milwaukee, Wis. ... there one season before transferring to Victory Valley Community College in California ... 2009: Madison ... 11 games of action ... School: First team ... defensive back as a senior ... teams player of the year ... yards rushing and 300 ... recorded 70 tackles in the season ... playoffs ... named a Milwaukee Journal Sentinel ... mention team selection at wide receiver ... all conference best wide ... three-time all conference selection in basketball ... coached by Kelly Masley ... 2010: 31 tackles (21 solo), 5 INTs, 4 PRU ... Chose the Ag

Outside of quarterback Johnny Manziel, there might not be a more decorated player in this year's class than **Howard Matthews** (6-2, 200, Clear Springs HS). After transferring to Clear Springs for his senior campaign, Matthews exploded onto the Houston-area 5A scene right out of the gates. Primarily lining up at running back, Matthews was the best player on a high school squad that featured fellow A&M commit Donnie Baggs and LSU linebacker commit Trevon Randle. Matthews emerged as the team's best running back, wide receiver, kick returner, punt returner and punter, and was arguably the team's best quarterback and safety prospect as well. He is slated to play safety at A&M, but Mike Sherman has already alluded to trying him out at tailback in short yardage situations.

Howard Matthews was born Aug. 31, 1993 ... Danley of Friendswood, Texas ... 2009. Had 9 interceptions ... one he returned for a touchdown, while playing on the ... Senior High School ... 2010: At Clear Springs ... for 864 yards and 6 TD's; 107 carries for 1,003 yards and 11 TD's ... 4 passing TD's; 2 kick off returns for TD; 1 INT on defense ... on a team All-State (AP). First Team All-Greater Houston ... (article), 24-5.1 First Team All-District ... No. 6 Athlete in Texas by Dave Campbell ... PrepStar All ... Superprep ... over Oklahoma State

Last but not least, the highly touted, highly talked about, and highly scrutinized **Floyd Raven** (6-2, 180, East St. John HS) rounds out the Aggies' secondary haul for 2011. There are a million stories regarding the signing day drama that surrounded Raven, but we'll stay away from that and give you the short version. Originally verbally committed to Ole Miss, Raven decommitted from the Rebels on an official visit to Utah, verbally committed to Mike Sherman and the Aggies on an in-home visit, only to decommit from A&M and recommit to Ole Miss a week before signing day. Then, on national signing day, Ole Miss received a letter of intent from Raven that was declared null and void, and the Aggies picked up his official and ultimately final letter of intent later that afternoon.

If you weren't able to follow all of that, just remember this – Floyd Raven, though somewhat controversial and undoubtedly misunderstood, is arguably the most talented cornerback prospect to sign with the Aggies in a decade. After forming a strong bond with Mike Sherman and defensive backs coach Chuck McMillian, Raven appears to have landed in the type of program and support system that he needs to reach his full potential.

Posted 38 tackles ... senior cornerback at East St. John ... No. 12 cornerback ... by Rivals.com ... No. 17 in Louisiana ... St. John ... 2010 ... Chose the Ag





KICKER (1)

With Randy Bullock entering his senior season, the Aggies needed to find a replacement for No. 28. It appears they've done just that with the signing of Pennsylvania's **Taylor Bertolet** (5-9, 165, Exeter Township HS). The strong-legged Bertolet was pegged as the top kicker in the nation by one recruiting service, and was also named an Under-Armour All American, where he kicked the game winning field goal in the final seconds and was hoisted upon his teammate's shoulders after the game.

Taylor Bertolet is the son of Taran and Blayne Bertolet of Rockton, Penn. born Oct. 24, 1992. 2009 Under Armour All American field goal attempts. Named for 11th in the nation in 2010. Made 4 of 6 field goal attempts and 1 of 4 of 5 extra points. 45 kickoff yards. Bertolet is a member of the National Honor Society and the Texas A&M Honor Society. He was named by Reader's Digest as No. 2 nationally in field goal kicking. Career field goal record is 11 for 11. First team All State. He is a member of the Big 33 team of the First Team All Big Country team. He was named the No. 1 in the state of Pennsylvania for field goal kicking. He is a member of the National Honor Society and the Texas A&M Honor Society. He is a member of the National Honor Society and the Texas A&M Honor Society. He is a member of the National Honor Society and the Texas A&M Honor Society.

PUNTER (1)

After an entire season of punting woes in 2010, the Ags scoured the high school ranks in search of a solution to their punting problem. A national search found **Drew Kaser** (6-3, 210, Walsh Jesuit HS) in Strongsville, Ohio – the hometown of A&M outside linebackers coach Nick Toth. One of the top high school punters in the nation, Kaser committed to the Aggies in January even after receiving interest from the home state Buckeyes. He'll be thrown into the punting competition the moment he steps on campus and could find himself starting as a true freshman this fall.

Kaser is a 6 foot 3 inch 210 lb. 16 year old. He kicked the No. 4 punting in the nation. He is the nation's No. 1 Street Varsity punter. He is a member of the Phi Delta Theta All State team. 8/11

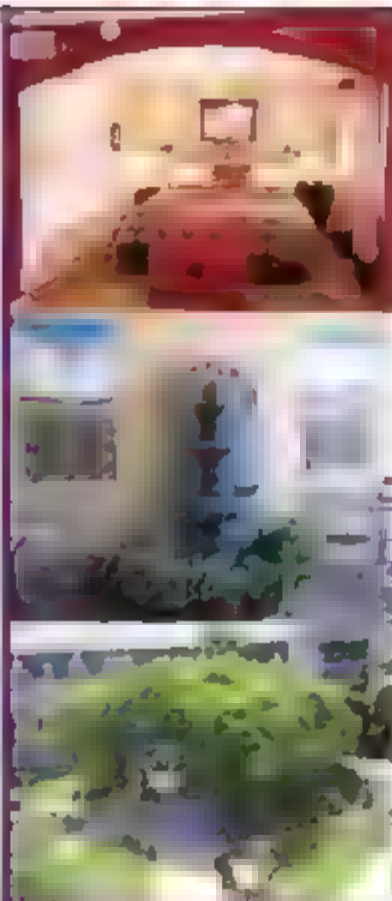
"When I was down there and the sound of the crowd got so loud, I don't know what else could motivate you more than anything like that. I wanted to strap up right then and there and go kick. I can't wait to hear that again."

8/11

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10

QUESTIONS FOR
KHRIE MIDDLETON

BY A STAFF



Where did you grow up?

I grew up in South Charleston, SC. It's a pretty large city in South Carolina. I started going to private school in the eighth grade. It was a really small school – about 800 people from 8 through twelve.

When did you start getting into sports?

I started playing baseball and basketball when I was about six. I really liked playing baseball, but when I started getting taller, it made it difficult to play. I stopped at about age 13 and went on basketball from then on.

When did you realize you were going to have an opportunity to play in college?

When I was about 14 or 15 I got involved with an AAU team in Atlanta, Ga. It was a very good team for my age and made me realize I needed to focus on basketball. Better Schools and Charleston started contacting me as a sophomore year. About midway through my junior year, I started hearing from basketball coaches.

What was high school basketball in Charleston like?

I was a lot of fun. I don't play with a lot of ease, but our line was pretty good. There was one other good team in the area. I was one dominant player. Unfortunately, they beat them two times. The state championship game. But winning a lot of games. I'm not used to losing. That's a good thing.

When did you first hear from Texas A&M?

I think it was April of my junior year. I didn't have any knowledge of A&M before then. Coach Spinelli and Coach Turgeon talked to me and let me know what A&M offered. My parents and I were some of our own and I just fell in love with it.

When did you make your first visit?

My mom's side of the family is from Shreveport, La. We went there for a family reunion. I went on and then I saw the campus. I wanted to go to a place that was new so I could focus on basketball.

Are you surprised that you have become one of the go-to guys as a sophomore?

Yes, it is a surprise. After my freshman year, I talked to Coach Turgeon in meetings and he told me my role was really going to change this year. He told me that I needed to work on proving all aspects of my game and not just scoring.

What did you do to prepare for this season knowing your role was going to increase?

I spent 5-6 hours every day in the gym. I was in the summer watching film of old games and working on my game.

Do you have a nickname?

Some of the guys call me K. Med or Jay Z.

What have you learned from the Aggie coaches?

I've learned that you can always get better. Everything you do is better what it is.

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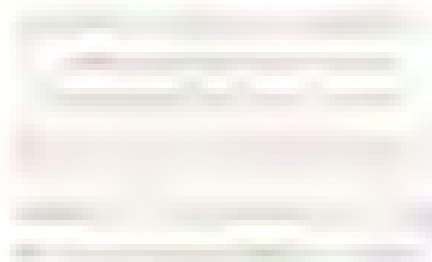


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COMING TOGETHER

After three injury-plagued seasons, things have finally come together for Maryann Baker

BY BRIAN DAVIS '01

Maryann Baker has come along way since playing basketball in the driveway with her dad and two older brothers. Everything has finally come together for the senior Aggie basketball player, but the road to get there was anything but easy.

Born and raised in Dallas, Baker is the youngest of four children. Sports have always been a big part of her family. Her father, Ron, played college basketball at the Division III level. Her youngest brother, Ben, played baseball at Texas Tech.

Basketball became a part of Baker's life at a very young age. She teamed up with her dad and played nonstop in their driveway against her two brothers. The competition was always pretty even over the years until her brothers got taller. Until then, Baker took advantage of her dad's height advantage and passed to him down low. With a 6-7 father, there's no question where she got her height (5-10).

Baker didn't get really serious about basketball until her sophomore year at Bishop Lynch Catholic High School. Her team won state again that year – they won it all four of her years there – and colleges started looking at her. She got an invitation to attend Texas A&M's elite camp that summer and made her first visit to meet Coach Blair and staff in Aggieland. They were so impressed that they offered her a scholarship.

"I like to have student-athletes from winning programs and Maryann is an example of what winning is all about," Blair said.

During her senior year in high school, things were going great for Baker – on and off the court. She officially signed with A&M on November 8, 2006 and was named homecoming queen just days before. Then, a few months later during the practice before their first round of playoff games, Baker tore her ACL. She had surgery and went through rehab at home before enrolling at A&M. Her first year in maroon and white was nothing like what she had envisioned.

"I didn't redshirt because I was capable of playing," she said, "but I was behind schedule from rehab. I basically lost all pre-season of my freshman year because I wasn't up to speed yet."

Unfortunately the injuries did not stop there. A few games into Big 12 play during her sophomore year, Baker tore her labrum in practice.

"I was diving for a ball when someone landed on me and my elbow was on the ball and my shoulder only had one way to go,"

she recalled.

That ended her season prematurely and things got worse when it was discovered that she had torn her meniscus at some point as well. Her sophomore year ended with shoulder surgery and knee surgery.

"Shoulder surgery was not fun," she recalled. "It was a couple of months of not sleeping because I was so uncomfortable. The rehab was painful and completely different than knee surgery."

During her junior year, Baker was finally somewhat healthy. Her shoulder would still pop out, so she was forced to wear an annoying brace to play – and still wears it – but at least she was able to play. However, she had a MRI after the season and got more bad news – her shoulder was not completely repaired and still partially torn.

"I decided not to have surgery just so I wouldn't have to go through the rehab again," she said. "I wanted to be full force for my senior year. Well, as much as I could be at least. So I think another surgery is looming at the end of the season."

Despite all the surgeries and rehabilitation, Baker has persevered with incredible hard work and determination.

"I know this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and I don't want to miss it," she said. "I know that I have to

make the most of what I have in front of me right now. I love being around all these girls and we're successful. It's always a little easier to push through pain when you're winning."

The program has done a lot of winning thanks to unselfish players like Baker, and as a senior, she's finally able to contribute more on the court. She's the team-leader in points and minutes off the bench and ranks near the top on the team in steals. When she comes on the court, Baker's objective is to bring energy and play great defense. Scoring points is secondary.

"Maryann is not a captain, but she's probably the best leader I have on the team," Blair said. "I think if the kids had to re-vote today, she'd be the captain of this basketball team, but the others just defer to her."

Coach Blair calls Baker a warrior, despite three injury-plagued seasons, and sees her as a player with a future in coaching if she chooses.

"It's like everything is finally coming together," Baker said. "Everything is working well right before it's over." ■

"I know this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and I don't want to miss it. I know that I have to make the most of what I have in front of me right now."

MARYANN BAKER



TEXAS A&M

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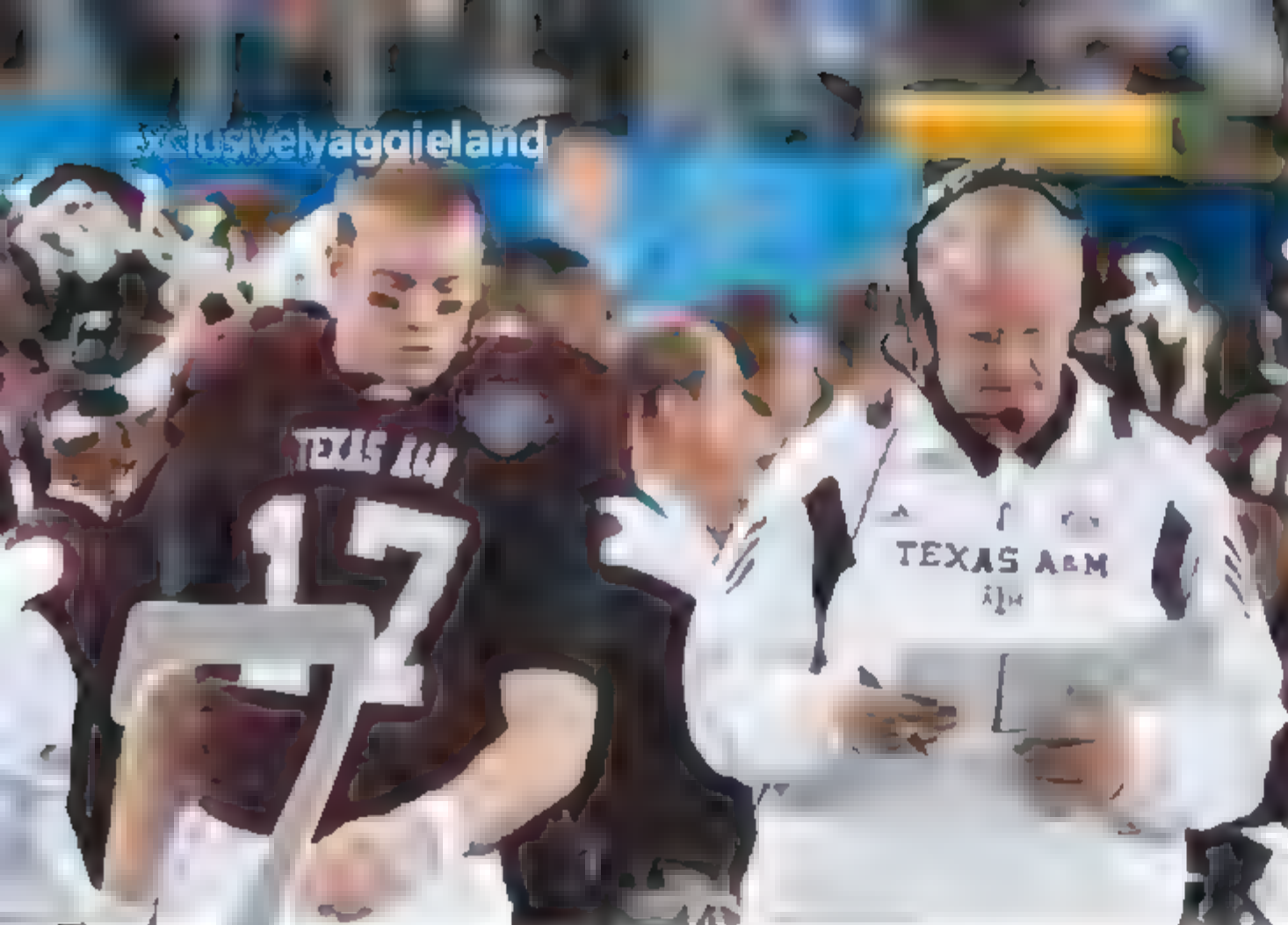
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THINGS ON THE AGGIE FOOTBALL OFFSEASON TO-DO LIST

BY JEREMY K. S. N. A. 04

As the Ags enter the offseason, they'll look to build upon a remarkable nine win season and take the next step towards competing for a Big 12 title in 2011. Here, we take a closer look at a few of the top agenda items to focus on during the offseason...

FORGET LSU

After rattling off six straight victories to bring the regular season to a close in 2010, the Aggies lost a heartbreaker to LSU in the Cotton Bowl. Though the loss was disappointing for players, coaches and fans alike, it's imperative that all parties put the loss behind them and look ahead to 2011. If nothing else, the Aggies learned that while they took giant steps as a program in 2010, there's still a long road ahead to return to the nationally prominent, top five football program that they aspire to become.

GET HEALTHY

The boys in maroon and white were wounded warriors down the home stretch of the season. Starting safety Steven Campbell's foot nagged him all season and starting cornerback Coryell Judie was operating on two bum shoulders in the Cotton Bowl against LSU. Defensive lineman Tony Jerod Eddie was cleared to participate in the bowl game just days before kickoff and who can forget Chris-

tine Michael suffering a broken leg mid-season. If time heals all, then spring drills probably need to be pushed back to May.

DEVELOP DEPTH

While the injury to Christine Michael was devastating, the Aggies were fortunate to have another impact player in Cyrus Gray ready and willing to carry the load after the injury. If C-Mike's injury taught us anything, it's that you can't have enough quality depth across the board. Though the cupboard was close to bare at the time of Sherman's arrival, he's had plenty of time to stockpile his own talent and replenish the Aggie roster. On paper, there appear to be some areas where there's a significant drop-off in terms of talent between first and second teamers on the Aggie roster. Sherman has nine months to close the gap.

REPLACE PATTERSON, MILLER AND HODGES

There's good news and bad news for the Aggie defense. First the good - there are eight returning starters, including the entire defensive secondary, and Tim DeRuyter turned down several other coaching opportunities to stay at A&M. The bad? The Aggies must replace two-time All-American Von Miller, two-time Big 12 defensive player of the week Michael Hodges, and their most experienced

defensive lineman in Lucas Patterson. While replacing the trio will be nearly impossible, the Ags must minimize their loss by capitalizing on areas of strength and finding new playmakers to rise to the occasion.

SOLVE THE GRAY/MICHAEL CONUNDRUM

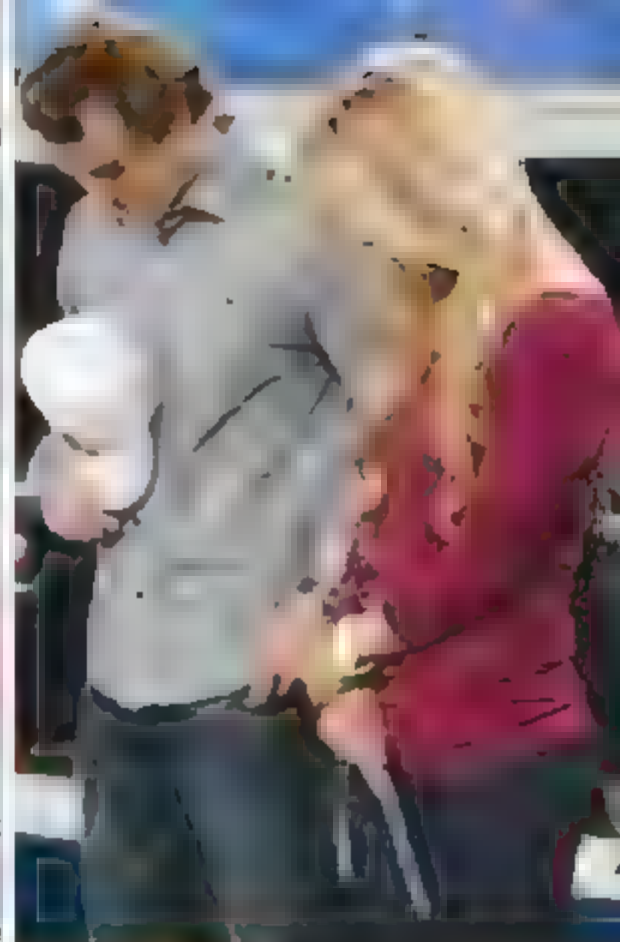
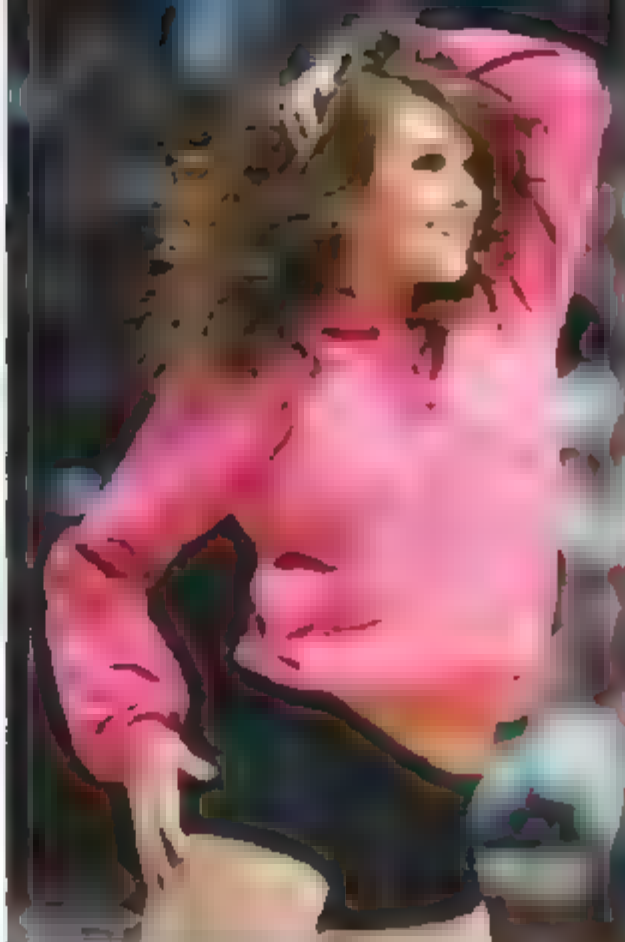
There isn't a more pressing issue, in our opinion, than to determine how to divvy up the carries at running back once Christine Michael returns from the leg injury that sidelined him for the second half of the season. Once C-Mike went down, Cyrus Gray passed the century mark in every game and became the first Aggie tailback to eclipse the 1,000 mark since Courtney Lewis in 2003. So what will the Aggies do in 2011? Allow Gray to continue to be the featured back, carry the ball 25 to 30 times a game and attempt to duplicate the formula for success in 2010? Or do they go back to splitting carries between Gray and Michael?

FIND A BACKUP QB

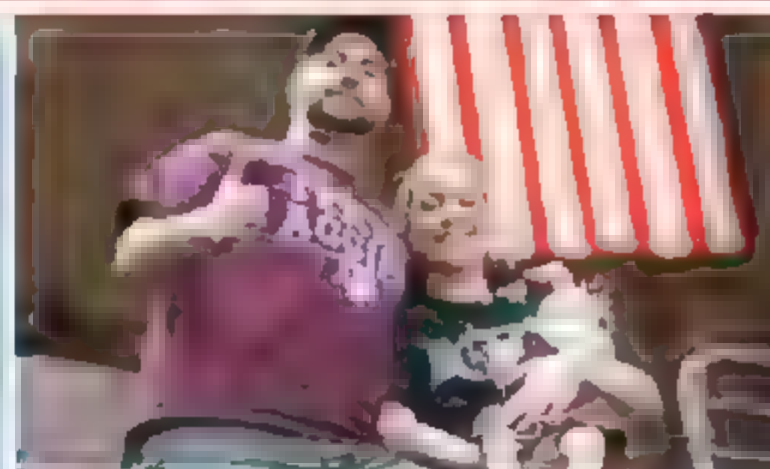
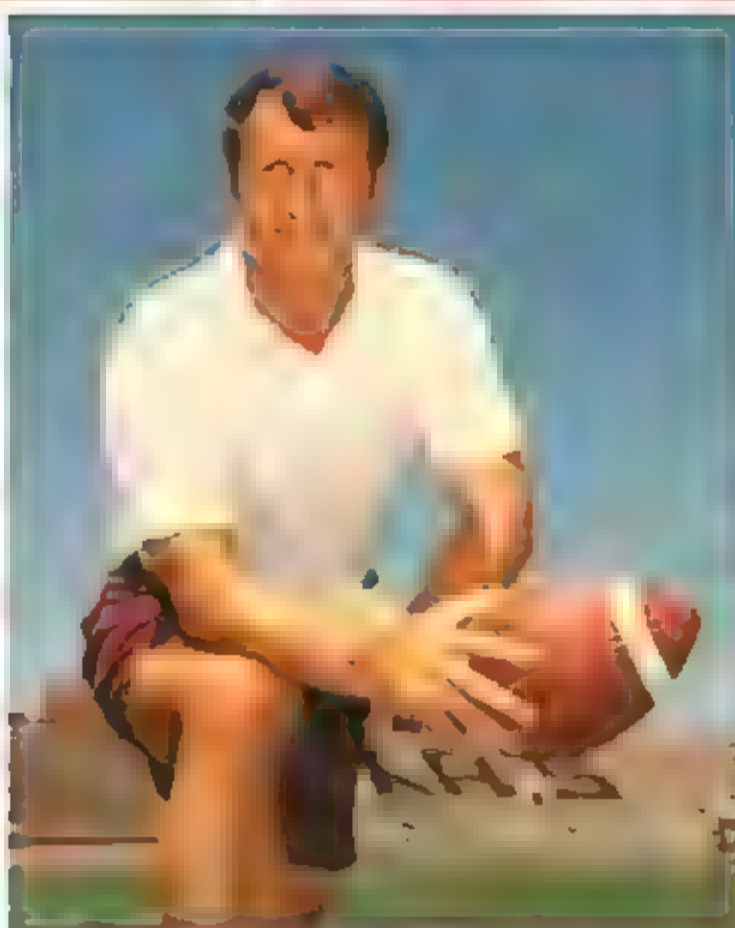
For the first time in almost a decade, the Aggies don't have a clear cut number two signal caller in place headed into the offseason. Ryan Tannehill was waiting in the wings behind Jerrod Johnson. Johnson was named the backup behind Stephen McGee. McGee was behind Reggie McNeal and McNeal followed Dustin Long prior to unseating him. So the question for the Aggies in 2011 remains, who will step in if necessary? Redshirt freshmen Matt Joeckel and Jameill Showers will compete with incoming freshman Johnny Manziel, who, like Showers and Joeckel a year ago, decided to forego his last semester in high school to participate in spring drills.

CONSISTENCY AT PUNTER

The Aggies finished at the bottom of only one Big 12 statistical category at the end of the season - punting. After special teams and punting blunders nearly allowed the outplayed, outmatched and outcoached Texas Longhorns to get back in the game in Austin this season, it's absolutely crucial that the Aggies find a respectable punting game in 2011. Incoming freshman Drew Kaser will be coming to Aggieland all the way from Strongsville, Ohio to compete for the starting job next fall. **W**



(top left) The Texas Aggie Dance Team overtook the Red Area Crowd. (top right) Many former players attended the Cotton Bowl including current Dallas Cowboys' QB Stephen McGee. (bottom middle) Legendary football coach Elmer Ballard died early Tuesday, Feb. 18 at his care facility in Georgetown, Texas. Credited with creating the (now-defunct) "Whataburger" offense, Ballard, 88, had been battling ALS, which is commonly known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. A member of the Texas A&M Athletic Hall of Fame and the Texas Sports Hall of Fame, Ballard served as the Aggie's head football coach and athletic director from 1973-92. (all others) The 12th Man has been filling Red Area in several stadiums for both the men's and women's games in 2014.





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Texas A&M

FENCING & HANDBALL

BY BRIAN DAVIS '01

FENCING

Fencing has been a part of Aggie culture since 1905 when 14 students formed the first club at the then all-male Texas A&M College. The club dropped off the map from 1909 to 1934, when it was re-established and began performing exhibitions during halftime of Aggie basketball games.

The Texas A&M Fencing Club has gone through many ups and downs over the years, but today it is as strong as ever. The club's members range from first-timers to those who have been fencing since age four. Current officer Kat Kelsch discovered the club at MSC Open House.

"I saw all the cool swords and wanted to play with them," she recalled.

For Kelsch, fencing started as something new and interesting to try while in college. Now it's a major part of her life.

"I went to a winter camp thinking I'd try to do a little more and now I've got a job fencing for a living," she said. "I teach little kids how to fence. It's really fun because at first they run at each other acting as if they have light sabers."

There are three types of weapons used in fencing – foil, sabre and épée.

In foil, the fencer wears a vest and can only target the torso, including the back. It requires the most finesse of the three and is more strategic like a chess match.

Sabre was originally done on horseback, so it only targets the upper body as well. Fencers call it "hack and slash" because they just run at each other and attack.

Épée is strategic like foil, but the fencers wear all white and the entire body is targeted. It is the slowest, but has the most going on.

In foil and épée, only the tip of the blade can be used to score points, while sabre can use the side of the blade as well.

"It's a great sport," Kelsch added. "I love it. It's so much fun. And you never find a normal person that fences."

The team practices Monday through Thursday nights in the Read Building on campus. Anyone interested in joining can do so at any time throughout the year.

HANDBALL

Not many kids grow up playing handball. In fact, over 90 percent of handball players are introduced to the sport in college.

Kayla Jones '09 is a perfect example. When she was registering for classes as a freshman kinesiology student, Jones struggled to find an open Kine 199 class. She had never heard of handball, but with her options limited, Jones decided to give the class a shot.

After watching the Texas A&M Handball Club compete in nationals later that year at the Student Recreation Center, she was hooked.

"I played select softball growing up," Jones said. "When I got to college and didn't have tournaments all the time I started going stir crazy."

Jones joined the club and has continued to improve her skills. Her hard work and dedication to the sport paid off last year when she won an individual championship in Division A at the USHA Nationals in Houston.

"I love the competition," she said. "I've made great friends – my roommate is in the club and I've met people from all over the world."

Dustin Van Brunt '12 is the current

club president and has played since his dad taught him the game as a young boy.

"Handball is a cool sport because you can play when you're a little kid and you can play when you're 80," he said.

In addition to nationals, the club competes in five or six regional and state tournaments a year. There are typically around 15 people in the club, two-thirds of which are typically male.

"It's difficult to get girls to play," Jones admits. "They don't want to hurt their hands. That scares people off, but it really only hurts if you mishit the ball."

The club practices three days a week for two hours and is always looking for new members to join – no experience required.

"It's not an easy sport to learn and that's part of the reason it's not very popular anymore," Van Brunt admits. "The rules are essentially the same as racquetball."

Van Brunt says to be a good handball player you have to be able to use your off-hand just as well as your dominant hand. You have to be smart and know what to do with the ball. And you have to be athletic and powerful.

"I'm sure I'll be playing my whole life," he said. "Sometimes you just keep getting better and better until you can't move anymore."

Now a graduate student working towards a master's degree in sport management, Jones shares Van Brunt's passion for the sport.

"I hope to still be playing when I'm 70 or 80. I need that tournament atmosphere in my life."

Visit recsports.tamu.edu for more information about the Texas A&M Handball Club or the Texas A&M Fencing Club. ■

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BUC-EE'S BEAVER

BY KATIE MCCONNELL '09



Any time spent along Texas highways is sure to leave you craving beef jerky. Sprinkled along the Texas landscape, Buc-ee's billboards keep you aware of how close you are to their practically endless supply of road trip treasures. From jellies to jerkies, Buc-ee's has what you need – and then some.

Having graduated from Texas A&M with a construction engineering degree, Arch "Beaver" Aplin III '80 never imagined that he would be a successful business owner of a popular convenience store chain. However, shortly after graduating Aplin opened his first store and began developing his notorious Buc-ee's brand and logo.

"I have had the nickname 'Beaver' all my life," said Aplin, "and I had a dog named Buck. I also knew of a 1940s cartoon character named 'Bucky Beaver.' Eventually all those things helped inspire the name."

Now with thirty locations, you can hardly consider Texas travels without thinking of the iconic buck-toothed beaver in a baseball cap.

"It's neat to see so many students wearing our shirts, and asking for us to build a location in their town," Aplin said.

Developed from two store types – a

smaller in-town store and a travel store – the Buc-ee's brand has made more than just a name for itself. In fact, with the variety of merchandise, you may forget that you're even in a convenience store. Some patrons – myself included – go out of their way to visit a Buc-ee's, and are always taken aback by the pristine conditions, gift choices, clothing and food. Have you tried the sausage-on-a-stick? How about some Beaver Nuggets? The store is more than just one of convenience – it's an experience.

From the small town of Lake Jackson, Texas, Aplin's time at A&M was an eye-opening experience, but he always appreciated the conservative values of the university. However, it was not until after graduation that Aplin began to fully understand the value in the Aggie name.

"I really began to see the camaraderie between Aggies, and I could see it well outside of Texas," he said. "I realized that if people saw your ring or heard that you went to school at A&M, there's a connection. There really is no boundary for how far the Texas A&M connection will go."

Although the corporate offices are located in Lake Jackson, Aplin's Aggie roots and business success have brought him back to campus.

"I've been asked by the Mays Business School to be a guest lecturer and I really enjoy doing that," he said. "It's exciting to see the enthusiasm of the business students."

It's no surprise that many of the students wonder what the secret to his success is, but Aplin doesn't claim any secrets.

"Owning thirty stores wasn't some great master plan," he admits. "We did one store, enjoyed it and were successful at it. One turned to two, and soon two turned to thirty."

Aplin does, however, have advice to young entrepreneurs.

"Go to a great university, try and get a great education, then go and do something that you love to do. The sky is the limit."

In regards to the future, Aplin is optimistic. Although they have always been in Texas, Aplin won't rule out the possibility of one day having stores outside the state.

"We still have a lot of ground to cover in Texas," he added.

As Aplin considers which community may be the home of a new Buc-ee's, he continues to enjoy discovering everything that a little beaver in a baseball cap has to offer. **BY**



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GLEN'S GREAT EIGHT

5. Granger's 21 Strikeouts, 1993

Jeff Granger set a Texas A&M record with 21 strikeouts against Lubbock Christian on April 2, 1993. "I remember holding the camera on him almost constantly anticipating his next strikeout. He finally got number 21." – Glen Johnson



In each issue of Volume 5 of AI, we are excited to share eight of Glen Johnson's most memorable moments from photographing all things Aggie. Glen has been the official photographer of Texas A&M Athletics since 1981. Special thanks to Glen for his contribution.

PHOTO BY GLEN JOHNSON, TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS MEDIA RELATIONS



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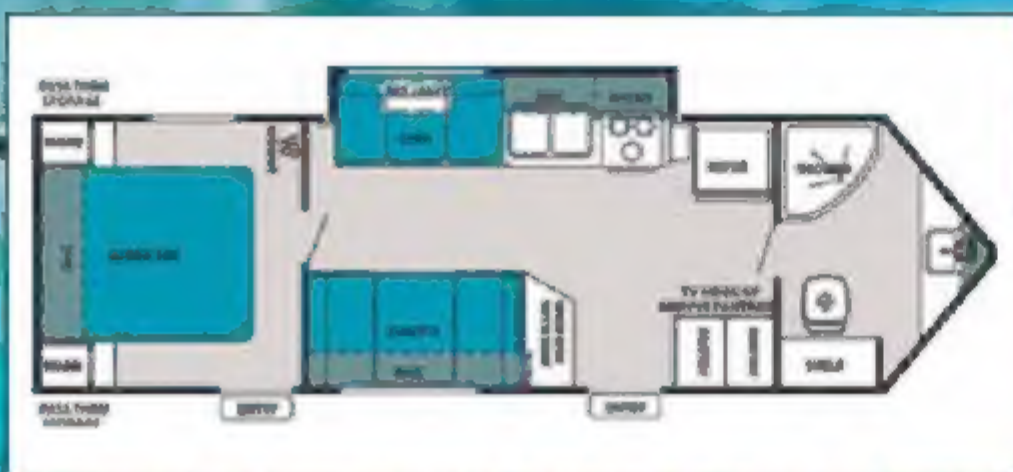
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